

The Villanelle

Rhyme and Repetition

What Is a Villanelle?

A villanelle is a nineteen-line poem divided into five tercets (three-line stanzas) and a final quatrain. Each tercet has the rhyme scheme *aba*. The quatrain has the rhyme scheme *abaa*.

*aba**aba**aba**aba**aba*

Tercets

abaa }

Quatrain

Repetition

The rhyme scheme isn't the only strict rule of the villanelle. This form also uses a distinct pattern of repetition.

- Lines 1 and 3 of the first stanza are used as refrains throughout the rest of the poem.
 - Line 1 is repeated as lines 6, 12, and 18.
 - Line 3 is repeated as lines 9, 15, and 19.
- The two lines used as refrains (lines 1 and 3) are paired as the final couplet.

"The House on the Hill" by Edwin Arlington Robinson

They are all gone away,
The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.

a
b
a

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

a
b
a
a

Through broken walls and gray
The winds blow bleak and shrill:
They are all gone away.

a
b
a

Nor is there one to-day
To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.

a
b
a

Why is it then we stray
Around the sunken sill?
They are all gone away,

a
b
a

And our poor fancy-play
For them is wasted skill:
There is nothing more to say.

a
b
a



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A Gift from the French

The villanelle originated in France. Originally the term *villanelle*, which means “rural or countrylike,” described light, lyric poems about the countryside.



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Hot Day in the Harvest Field by William Gosling ca. 1877

The Modern Villanelle

- Modern-day villanelles are written on a variety of topics and do not require a light tone.
- Many modern poets have crafted poems in this complex form, although some may alter the form slightly for effect.
 - Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night”
 - W. H. Auden, “Villanelle”
 - Theodore Roethke, “The Waking”
 - Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art”

What Have You Learned?

1. The villanelle form originated in France.
a. true b. false
2. A villanelle includes only two rhymes repeated throughout the poem.
a. true b. false
3. Modern-day villanelles always have a light tone.
a. true b. false

The End